

Aeris's Resurrection

by Kris1

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Summary: Just what the title says. =) It's 4 parts and is complete.

Um . . . please review!

1. Default Chapter Title

Aeris's Resurrection Part 1

>

Even after Cloud and the gang had defeated Sephiroth, they continued with their adventures. One day, while Cloud, Yuffie, and Vincent had been cruising around in Vincent's new car-a shiny, sleek black Jaguar-a man ran up to their car, pleading for help. That is how their new adventure begins...

>
 Vincent stopped the car the instant the man ran up. He then proceeded to roll down the window, lean out halfway, and ask, "What's wrong?"

>
 "Please! My town is in trouble!" the man replied desperately, all the while casting nervous, hurried glances back in the direction of a mountainous area.

>
 "How can we help?" Cloud asked, letting genuine concern pass over his face as he pushed Vincent aside to get a better look at the man.

>
 The stranger seemed old-his hair was graying at his temples and age lines wrinkled his tanned forehead and the pouches of skin near his eyes. Despite his apparent old age, the man was muscular and he had an air of one who commands respect.

>
 By the looks of him, the stranger had obviously been in a major fight. His shirt was torn, he had a black eye, and blood oozed down his arm from a high, deep-looking cut on his shoulder.

>
 His eyes were filled with desperation, sorrow, and concern. Cloud guessed that his side was losing in whatever battle raged between the two high, rugged mountains.

>
 Cloud's examination all happened in a matter of seconds, but before he knew it, Vincent had invited the man into the car and Yuffie was sliding over to make room for him in the back.

>
 As they drove towards the center of the two large mountains

that Cloud had noticed earlier, the man, whose name was Baron Derek Aarons, told them his story.

>
 "The Shin-hwa forces, which are a separate branch of the Shin-ra, heard about how the group of terrorists that call themselves AVALANCHE annihilated Shin-ra. Now they've decided to go on a worldwide rampage to hunt these guys down and kill them-to make them pay for what they've done, in other words.

>
 "Unfortunately for us, our town was nearest to their headquarters and thus the first on their list," and thus the first on their list," and here Aarons let out a sigh. "Their forces... outnumber us greatly, and I'm afraid the odds are all against us. We could use all the help we can get. Though I do realize that your help would put you all at a great risk." By now, Aarons had stopped looking at them, and was now studying his hands.

>
 "I'm sorry about your town," Yuffie said, placing a reassuring hand on his arm. "Of course we'll help. We'll kick their sorry asses to hell and back just like we did with Shin-ra!"

>
 "So you're the group AVALANCHE?" Aarons asked with unfeigned wonder.

>
 "You bet we are!" Yuffie replied haughtily. "And when you've got Yuffie the Materia Hunter on your side, you're bound to win!" Now she directed her attention to Cloud. "Don't you think we should call the others? The more people, the better chance of winning, right? And I, for one, don't intend on losing. " As an afterthought she added: "I wonder if those Shin-hwa dudes have any materia?"

>
 Ignoring her statement about materia, Cloud pulled out his PHS. He agreed with her idea of phoning the others, if not with her question of the materia. They had a major war to fight here, and all she could wonder about was the damn materia! Oh, well. She was the one who had remembered to phone the others, and she was a very useful ally, so Cloud didn't mention anything about her irrelevant thought about materia.

>
 After a brief conversation with Barret telling where they were and what the situation was, Cloud hung up and looked to Aarons. "Do you know how close we are to your city from here?" he asked.

>
 "I'd say we're only a few minutes away now," Aarons replied. The desperate, pathetic look had left his eyes and they were now filled with the look of someone who knows that they are going to win. Apparently Yuffie's attitude was contagious.

>
 After a short drive along a rocky path, the Baron called for them to stop. "We're here now."

>
 They all stepped out of the car. The view that greeted them was one of mountainous beauty. They had stopped on a winding dirt road that wrapped around the large mountain and headed towards the center, where Aarons's town was located.

>
 "I don't see anyone." Yuffie stated the obvious, her hand on her shuriken.

>
 "Yes," Aarons replied. "I stopped you early because a car rolling into Nicholstown in the middle of a battle may seem more than a little suspicious. To both sides. If we follow this road, we will make a less conspicuous appearance. It's not a long way to go." Aarons bolted off at an all-out sprint, intent on saving his village.

>
 "Wait up!" Yuffie panted as she struggled to keep up with Aarons's blazing pace.

>
 After a sharp turn, the village was in sight. Sounds of a battle could be heard-gunshots, shouts, and grunts of agony.

>
 A couple more strides and they arrived. It was hard to believe how easily Aarons had come off. Arrows flew in from almost every direction, soldiers and townspeople fought in the streets, and most

soldiers were armed with machetes, ready for action.

>
 As for the town itself, it couldn't really be called a town anymore. Most buildings were charred ruins or smoldering wrecks.

>
 Yet Cloud had to give the townspeople a lot of credit. They were fighting courageously, though as Aarons had stated earlier, all the odds were against them. Of course, with AVALANCHE here to help them, that could all change.

>
 "We better get in there and help!" Yuffie yelled. Before Cloud or Vincent could reply, she had drawn her shuriken and charged into battle.

>

* * * * *

>

A few minutes later, a large blue Chevy van came to a screeching halt.

>
 "C'mon, you guys! We have to hurry! Cloud's in danger!" Tifa yelled worriedly as she jumped out of the van.

>
 The others followed her as she ran in the direction of the town, her dark brown hair flying behind her.

>
 Once they arrived, they had the same reaction as Cloud's.

>
 "This town is in ruins," Tifa whispered, spying the burning buildings.

>
 "Let's pay those bastards back for this!" Cid declared, and ran into the town to help.

>
 "Where's Cloud?" Tifa asked no one in particular, not bothering to hide the anxiety and worry in her large eyes.

>
 She saw a flash of metal in the distance and heard metal clashing against metal as a fight raged on.

>
 Tifa ran through the fields, wincing as she stepped over dead bodies. _So many dead, _she thought sadly as she continued. But there was no time to mourn over the casualties now.

>
 Just as Tifa thought that she had spotted Cloud, a hand grabbed her roughly on the shoulder and whirled her around.

>
 She had just enough time to catch a glimpse into blue eyes as cold as ice before one of the man's fists flew towards her face. The other was on her shoulder, but she still was able to duck. Tifa could feel the whoosh of air above her head. His fist had missed her by mere inches.

>
 Tifa brought her own fist straight into the man's stomach and hit home. He let out a grunt of pain, and his hands flew to his stomach, releasing the vise-like grip that they earlier had on Tifa's shoulder. _Free!_ she thought incoherently.

>
 Instinct told her to run, run away as fast as she could, but she ignored it. Besides this man was unarmed. She thought that she would be able to take him in ease. Tifa assumed a fighting stance as he charged her again.

>
 She brought her leg up in a high kick aimed for the soldier's head, but he avoided it and punched her in the stomach, leaving her gasping for air.

>
 He saw his chance and began pummeling Tifa with his fists. She held up her arms in an attempt to block her face from his vicious blows. Things were beginning to look bad, very bad.

>
 Just when it looked as if things couldn't get any worse, or better for that matter, she saw a flash of metal as something cut its way through the air. The next moment the soldier let out a pathetic wail of pain and clutched at his back.

>
 His eyes were filled with questions-_this wasn't supposed to happen. I wasn't supposed to die! How did this happen to me?_-then he

fell over, dead.

>
 Blood gushed from his back in a steady river, forming a puddle around him. Out of his back arched a shiny steel object. It took a moment for Tifa to realize that it was Yuffie's shuriken.

>
 Tifa heard a shriek and saw Yuffie speeding towards her with two soldiers hot on her tail.

>
 "Tifa, HELP!" Yuffie screeched. "Pass me my shuriken!"

>
 Oh, no, Tifa thought as she looked numbly at the shuriken protruding out of the dead man's back. Sure, she had helped to kill Sephiroth and the others, but it never got any easier looking at the dead. Especially if she had to touch them. She tried to ease her nerves as she grasped the shuriken and pulled. She almost hurled at the squelching noises it made when it was pulled out of the dead man's body. Trying to think comforting thoughts, Tifa threw it to Yuffie.

>
 Yuffie caught it with one hand and spun around to face the soldiers. They took out their weapons-swords similar to Cloud's-and held them up to face Yuffie. With a single flick of Yuffie's wrist, both men were dead-decapitated by Yuffie's shuriken.

>
 "Thanks, Tifa!" Yuffie yelled as she ran down the hill.

>
 Now feeling had begun to come back into Tifa and she thought that she could talk without her voice quavering. "Where's Cloud?" Tifa asked, wiping her bloody hands on her skirt.

>
 "He's fighting up front with the Baron," Yuffie replied casually. "Where I just was," she couldn't resist adding.

>
 Tifa's eyes opened wide in terror and concern. "He's...up there?" She gestured toward the hill.

>
 "Yeah, and as a matter of fact, I should get back up there, too. Come on!" Yuffie said as she ran back up the hill.

>
 "Well, here goes nothing," Tifa murmured as she followed Yuffie.

>
 When the two girls reached the top of the hill, Tifa looked down, which was a big mistake. _Where could Cloud be in all of this mess?_ she wondered. Soldiers were everywhere. Then an uninvited thought crept into her mind. _Is he still alive?_

>
 She looked around to ask Yuffie if she knew where Cloud was, but Yuffie was already running down the hill. Without hesitating, Tifa ran after her.

>
 Tifa heard loud gunshots and surveyed the area. She saw Vincent and two Shin-hwa soldiers shooting at each other while taking cover behind rocks. Yuffie was sneaking towards them while hiding behind rocks. Tifa mimicked her movements.

>
 The gunshots went on for a couple more seconds before only empty clicks could be heard from Vincent's direction.

>
 "Dammit," Yuffie whispered under her breath. "He's shooting blanks."

>
 "We've got to help," Tifa whispered back.

>
 "My thoughts exactly," Yuffie replied, still whispering. "Hold this. If any soldiers come, you know what to do." Yuffie handed her shuriken to Tifa. "I'm gonna go save Vincent."

>
 Before Tifa had a chance to speak, Yuffie was sneaking off again. Yuffie moved quickly and quietly in the soldiers' direction. Now she was only a rock away. "Okay, breathe." Yuffie quietly instructed herself before running up behind one of the soldiers.

>
 She did a quick karate-chop to the side of his neck. It would've knocked him out cold if he hadn't turned at the last minute. But Yuffie always fought with a backup plan prepared. When he turned, Yuffie kicked the machine gun out of his hands. Before the soldier had time to react, Yuffie had grabbed the machine gun up.

>
 Just as she was about to shoot the guy, Yuffie noticed that

the other soldier had noticed her and was now turning in her direction. Without knowing she was about to do it, Yuffie pulled the weaponless soldier in front of her as her human shield. A very useful shield, too. The bullets that his friend fired hit him and only him.

>
 Yuffie threw the dead man aside and shot his partner quickly three times in the chest area. She knew instinctively that he was dead.

>
 "Vincent! I got them both!" Yuffie yelled.

>
 "Thanks!" he yelled back, running over to where Yuffie was. "But I just ran out of bullets and that was the last clip."

>
 "Take this." Yuffie gave him the machine gun that she had taken from the first soldier. She then motioned for Tifa to come over. "You," and Yuffie pointed to Tifa "take the other one."

>
 Tifa did as Yuffie instructed. She knew that defending herself with a gun would be much more effective than with her bare fists.

>
 "Come on, Yuffie, Tifa," Vincent said once Tifa had the machine gun in her hands. "We need to go up front and help Cloud."

>
 Tifa looked up at the mention of Cloud's name. Then she remembered the soldiers. Her eyes narrowed angrily and she held the gun more surely now. "Yeah. Let's go kick some Shin-hwa ass."

>
 Yuffie looked at her and nodded in agreement. Now that she had her shuriken back, she was more sure of herself. "Lead the way," Yuffie told Vincent.

>
 Vincent solemnly nodded and led them to another clearing.

>
 "Oh, God," Tifa whispered. "Cloud's down there?" This place was infested with soldiers. She began to believe that he was dead. No one could survive this.

>
 "Yes, he is," Vincent replied. He took up a sniper's position on a rock and motioned for Tifa to do the same. "Let's kill as many as we can from up here. Then it'll be easier for us when we get down there."

>
 Tifa and Vincent started shooting. About 15 soldiers were dead before anyone noticed. Another 15 were killed before the situation got too dangerous to continue.

>
 As Tifa looked down, she spotted Cloud. She let out a startled gasp when she saw his condition. A line of blood ran down his arm, presumably from a large gash. _Probably made from a blade, _the street-smart section of her brain told her. Though it said probably, it knew positively. It also told her to run to him. That she was his last hope.

>
 She obeyed.

>
 "Tifa, where are you going?" Yuffie demanded, trying to keep her voice as low as possible. "Jesus Christ!" Yuffie ran after Tifa when Tifa didn't so much as turn back.

>
 Vincent glanced up, startled, as he saw his two companions running down the hill towards the valley. "Are they crazy?!" he muttered before he was hit on the head with the butt of a gun. Everything began to swim around and blur together in his head. Vincent turned around with amazing slowness and glimpsed the soldier who had hit him. He emptied the machine gun into the soldier before everything went black.

>

* * * * *

>

Tifa never felt the pain when a bullet grazed her shoulder. All that mattered now was Cloud's safety. She needed to get to him, needed to

save him. He needed her help. Yes, she was sure of that. Tifa was not aware of Yuffie behind her. All she could think about was getting to him, saving him before-

>
 A soldier jumped in front of her, interrupting her thoughts.

>
 "Get outta my way," Tifa growled.

>
 The soldier didn't reply but instead aimed his revolver at her head.

>
 "Get the hell outta my way!" Tifa heard her voice raise with fury. She was blinded by rage at this man-this _creature_- trying to interfere with her plan. Her hands seemed to move with a will of their own as they pulled the trigger and held it down. Tifa brought the gun upward, making a line of ragged holes in the soldier's body. Now no one could stop her. Just let them try.

>
 Without much more confrontations, she reached the area where Cloud and the soldier were dueling.

>
 Metal clashed against metal as Cloud brought his sword down and the other man blocked it with his own, or vice versa.

>
 Blood was pouring out of the gash in Cloud's arm and another one in his leg.

>
 Again, rage overtook Tifa and she brought down the butt of her gun onto the soldier's head. She could hear the crack of bone, but it seemed far away.

>
 Then her legs gave up on her and she fell to the ground. She was aware of a man's voice-Cloud's-telling her not to worry, that everything was going to be fine. She could hear Yuffie, too. She could also hear sobbing noises-_Is that me? _she wondered before she slipped into unconsciousness.

>

* * * * *

>

"Ugh," Tifa mumbled, grabbing her forehead. She noted the purplish bruises on her arms. _Why am I not surprised?_ she mused before looking around. She was in a large white room, on a large clean bed. The room smelled of antiseptics and sterilization and she noticed that she wasn't in her normal clothes. "Where am I?" Tifa asked a nurse.

>
 "You're in Nicholstown, of course," the nurse replied. "Quite a big battle yesterday. I heard you killed the captain. Imagine that." The nurse's hazel eyes glowed with admiration. "By the way, I'm Nancy."

>
 "Really?" Tifa asked, still half-asleep. All that seemed so far away. And it had been only yesterday? Then she suddenly snapped back to reality. "Where's Cloud? Is he all right? Did he-?"

>
 Nancy interrupted her. "He's fine. He was up and about hours ago."

>
 "But how can that be?" Tifa asked, talking more to herself than to Nancy. "I saw his cuts. Those slashes-he should've been in Intensive Care for weeks."

>
 "No, of course not. You see, we import this special herb from Svenson Hills. It fixes up cuts like that." Nancy snapped her fingers for emphasis. "Seals you up real good in a matter of seconds."

>
 "Yup, Svenson Hills has all kinds of stuff. Heard a certain woman there can even bring people back from the dead. Imagine that. I also heard that it's beautiful at sunset. Never been there myself, of course, what with the job and all, but someday I'd like to go," Nancy continued.

>
 Cloud ran into the room. "Tifa, I think I may have found a way

to bring Aeris back!" For a moment, he looked like a smiling child.

>
 Tifa offered him a grin that she hoped didn't look as fake as it felt. How could he have no concern over how _she _was doing? It was always Aeris this, Aeris that, never anything about Tifa! But she did not voice these thoughts aloud, of course. Instead, she said:

"Really? Well, we should get going as soon as possible, then."

>
 To be continued...

>
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2. Default Chapter Title

Aeris's Resurrection Part 2

>

> Now here they were, on their way to Svenson Hills to find the "legendary Sage Katrina." Tifa rolled her eyes. Would Cloud be doing all of this if she had died instead of Aeris?

>
 "Here we are." Vincent announced, breaking into Tifa's thoughts. He parked the Jaguar outside the town.

>
 When Tifa stepped out of the car, she understood why the nurse had wanted to come someday. Lush green fields surrounded the medium-sized town. A small reservoir was to left and beautiful wildflowers grew on the hills behind the town. It must be really beautiful when the sun sets, like Nancy thought, Tifa's mind suggested as she followed Cloud and Vincent into the town.

>
 "So, Cloud, where do you propose we start looking?" Tifa asked, gazing at the town, which now seemed larger now that she had entered it.

>
 "I guess the store owners would probably know her," Cloud suggested, though it sounded like more of a question than a suggestion.

>
 "Okay." Vincent and Tifa agreed in unison. Tifa agreed a little half-heartedly, but Cloud didn't notice. He was already wrapped up in his own little dreamworld, waiting for the day when he and Aeris would be together again. Thus, the search for Sage Katrina began.

>
 They had to wait awhile at the inn since another customer was booking a room. The wait seemed like hours to Cloud, though it was less than five minutes in reality. When the innkeeper had finished with the customer, Cloud stepped in front of the desk. "Do you know where Sage Katrina is?" Cloud asked politely.

>
 The innkeepers eyes dropped from Cloud's face almost instantly. His former polite smile was replaced by one of grimness and confusion as he muttered a hurried 'no'.

>
 Cloud's expression was one of puzzlement as he walked back to Tifa and Vincent.

>
 The innkeeper, Tifa noticed, was now greeting another customer. Though his polite smile was back on his face, his eyes revealed something else: that question of why. The question that Tifa had seen in the soldier's face before he had died. The wondering sensation of 'how and why did this happen to me?' Tifa knew the feeling well. She had felt it when Cloud fell in love with Aeris. But before she had any time to wonder why the question was in the innkeeper's eyes, Cloud was dragging them off to an items shop.

>
 But it turned out to be useless. They got the same answer from the woman who worked at the items shop, the man at the weapons shop,

and it just continued in that process in each shop that they entered. Now they were heading towards the last one. Before they could reach it, a girl stopped them.

>
 "I hear you're looking for Sage Katrina. I may be able to help you." she said casually.

>
 Tifa looked the girl over. She had shoulder-length blonde hair and emotionless blue eyes. She looked about twenty-five (at least) and was clad entirely in black leather. A black leather tank top and tight black shorts under a black leather jacket with black knee-high boots was what she wore. Tifa wasn't sure if this girl was worth trusting. She looked more like a Goth or a vampire or something like that than someone who would have information about Sage Katrina.

>
 "Cloud, I..." _Don't know if we should trust her,_ was what Tifa was going to say, but it was too late. Cloud had already asked the girl if she could take them to Sage Katrina.

>
 "Sure," the girl answered, the beginning of a smile playing on her lips. "By the way, my name is Pretticina Arnold, but everyone calls me Prett," she told them. "Follow me.

>
 Prett turned around and started walking down a path on the hill. She didn't look back to see if they would follow her. She knew intuitively that they would. They always did.

>
 Again, Tifa had doubts about whether or not they could believe the girl. What if she wasn't telling the truth? But she knew that it would be useless to try to dissuade Cloud.

>
 Tifa became uneasy as Prett led them farther and farther away from the village. They were following a path, but that nothing to calm Tifa's nerves. She kept being reminded of those cheesy horror movies where the previews had the line "Out here, no one can hear you scream." Somehow it seemed more scary now than it ever had in those movies. But then again, it was happening to her, not to some actors or actresses.

>
 By now, Tifa could see that Cloud had fully put his trust into Prett. Vincent, meanwhile, was too absorbed in his own little world. Sometimes that made Tifa wonder what he was thinking about, as she was now. What _did _he think about, anyways? Tifa knew what Cloud thought about-Aeris and only Aeris. _Unfair, _she mumbled in her mind.

>
 She shook her head, and noticed something that turned her unease to downright worry. Prett had taken them to a cemetery. Tifa looked up at the sign over the Gothic-style arches to make sure, and, without much relief, saw that she was right.

>
 Why did she take us to a cemetery? Cloud thought anxiously in disbelief. By now he had stopped walking, but Prett continued toward the gravestones. _She couldn't be...

>
 _"Sage Katrina is dead." Prett said emotionlessly. She leaned over to place a bouquet of roses by a tombstone. "This is her final resting place."

>
 Where did those come from? Cloud's mind screamed frantically. The logical part of it managed to talk him into skeptically believing that Prett had been carrying them all along and that the reason he hadn't been able to see them was because he was too deep in his own thoughts at the moment. _ What else could've happened? _he mused.

>
 Now Prett stood up and turned around. She flashed a winning smile at them, but her blue eyes remained clear and vacant. "I'm the only living relation of Sage Katrina as of now. I'm her daughter."

>
 Prett waited to see the expressions on their faces-shock, disappointment, doubt-before continuing. "I'm sure that you asked other people in this town. They all told you that they never heard of

her." Prett's mouth twisted into a little snarl and her eyes now held emotion in them: cold hatred and bitter contempt. "Let me tell you why.

>
 "One day, seven years ago, a child was found dead. Of an unnatural cause. The next day a pup was born with two heads. The people suspected sorcery or witchcraft and, naturally, all fingers pointed to my mother. They had her hanged. I was only twelve at the time. It's actually quite amazing that they didn't run me out of town, too." Prett laughed, but it was humorless and bitter.

>
 "Maybe you can still help us," Cloud said uneasily, not meeting Prett's cold gaze.

>
 Cloud, no! Tifa felt like shrieking. _What kind of an idiot are you? She's a witch, Cloud! We can't trust her!_ But of course, Tifa held her tongue.

>
 "You see-" Cloud began.

>
 Prett cut him off with a wave of her hand. "If you want to talk, let's do it at my house. This cemetery is a bit unsettling, don't you think?" She flashed another pretty smile at them, but her eyes remained guarded. Tifa had thought that Vincent was cold and distant, but this girl really took the cake.

>
 As Tifa thought all of this, Prett spun on her heel and began walking in the direction opposite the town. They would probably still follow, she thought. The blonde guy-Cloud, was it?-would most likely follow her. Something to do with an 'Aeris' his mind kept summoning up. The other man-Vincent-he reminded her of herself, and she wanted to get to know him better. _What was his story?_, she wondered. More importantly, would he even come? She hoped so. He seemed...interesting. But the girl-Tifa, her mind supplied-didn't trust her. But they would all come if Cloud decided to. Prett sensed that he was the leader of their little group.

>
 An involuntary smile lit up her face and made her beautiful instead of just merely pretty. Well, if they didn't come, they would definitely be safe. From her, at least. She didn't know about the townspeople. But if they followed her, Prett couldn't guarantee their safety.

>
 Vincent took a quick look around. Prett wasn't following a path anymore, though she seemed to know exactly where she was going. There seemed to be no houses in sight, and this worried him. What a place for a woman to be living, he thought. Though if the townspeople were mad at her, she would probably rather live far away from the town, making this location a perfect candidate.

>
 Tifa was also surveying their surroundings nervously. _Cloud, what have you gotten us-correction, me-into? I can't believe this!_ _Tifa brushed a stubborn lock of hair off of her forehead and looked up. Night already? She glanced down at her watch. 7:00 pm?! They had arrived here around 5:00 and the sun had still been high in the sky. (Well, sort of.) When had it gotten dark so suddenly? She shuddered and cast a sour glance at Prett. Maybe she really was a witch. Actually, it was highly probable.

>
 Before Tifa had a chance to dwell on these thoughts, Prett announced their arrival.

>
 The house was a Victorian-style two story building. It looked ancient and had vines crawling up the sides of the walls. It had an abandoned look to it and was surrounded in black slush that couldn't really pass for mud.

>
 "Tha-that's where you live?" Cloud stammered incredulously. There wasn't even a mailbox! It didn't look as if there might be a telephone inside...or electricity, for that matter. How did her friends reach her? Then it dawned on him all at once. She probably had no friends. After all, according to her story, she hated the

townspeople and they didn't seem to want anything to do with her. Because they thought that she was a witch, too.

>
 "Well, are you coming or not?" Prett demanded as she opened the door. Seh hoped that it turned out all right for them; she really did. She didn't want to have to kill any of them, but, if they said or did anything wrong, she wouldn't hesitate.

>
 They walked into the house after Prett and looked around. Cloud had been right about one thing; there was no telephone. Tifa was surprised that the lights actually worked. How did you get electricity out here?

>
 The inside of the place was just as bad as the outside. It looked as if it hadn't been occupied in years. But that was exactly what Prett wanted, right? No nosy neighbors poking around, no one knowing exactly where she lived. _Out here, NO one will be able to hear you scream._ The voice came out of the pit of Tifa's heart and filled her with fear. She should never have watched those movies, she thought. What if Prett tried to kill them all with a scythe or something?

>
 Shut up, Tifa, the logical part of her mind replied. _Why would she do that? What exactly would her motive be? She doesn't even KNOW you. So answer that, Little Miss-

>
 _But that part of Tifa's mind had no answer for what Tifa's eyes sent to it. Prett was holding (with experienced ease, you might add) a semi-automatic pistol. She had it pointed directly at Cloud's stomach, and didn't look as if she would stop to think about using it if that was what it all came down to after this conversation.

>
 "Why did you want to see Sage Katrina?" Prett demanded coldly, but, as in the short time that Tifa had known her, her eyes remained guarded and distant.

>
 Cloud sighed. He didn't seem to be afraid even though at any given time, the gun could fire and he could be killed. He slowly told Prett the story of how Aeris was killed. He didn't tell her about killing Sephiroth, though, or saving the planet; that just didn't seem important right now. But he did tell her of how they had learned of Sage Katrina. "And so I figured that Sage Katrina might've been able to help us," he finished, his eyes never leaving Prett's.

>
 Prett thoughtfully considered this story for awhile, then put the gun down. "I may be able to help you," she said softly. "As I told you earlier, I'm Katrina's daughter. She trained me in sorcery, and I know almost as much as she does." Prett looked at them expectantly, daring them to contradict her.

>
 "You...you can bring Aeris back?" Cloud asked, clearly astonished. "How soon can you do it?"

>
 "Tonight, if you wish. But where is this...woman, I assume?" Prett questioned casually, as if she did this sort of thing every day.

>
 Cloud's face fell. "Well, when she died, we dropped her into this lake. That's where she must still be." He gazed at Prett sadly. "I should've known it wouldn't be so easy..."

>
 Prett's amused smirk surprised them all. "It is easy!" she exclaimed honestly. "Do you have any pictures of her or anything? Because that would make it even easier." She smiled with genuine amusement this time, and for the first time in years, it reached her eyes.

>
 It was at that moment that Vincent realized that she was just like him. He hadn't caught it earlier, but it hit him now. He thought that her past must not have been easy either, and he could sense that she was hiding something. Her eyes showed him that; he could even see it in her smile; how she was not entirely letting her past go. Prett's now-friendly attitude surprised him, though. She had been so

cold moments earlier, but now she was...smiling?

>
 "How will you bring Aeris here?" Vincent asked.

>
 "Hmm? Oh! Well, I've told you that I am a sorceress, right? I can bring her here by teleportation." Prett explained confidently.

"Then I can bring her back to life."

>
 Cloud mused over how easy it all was. "Teleportation?" he wondered out loud. Surely it couldn't be that easy, could it? He supposed it could, but he still had his doubts. He wouldn't believe it until he saw it, in other words.

>
 Prett's voice interrupted his thoughts. "-a picture of her or anything that belonged to her?"

>
 "Yeah." Cloud replied as he took out his wallet. From there he produced a small headshot of Aeris. His eyes brimmed with tears as he saw her picture-her large green eyes filled with the happiness of earlier times. If Prett was unable to do as she had promised, those eyes would never open again. He wiped an arm across his face, but Prett seemed not to notice. Either that, or she was pretending not to for his own benefit. Cloud believed that it was the latter. He thought that it would be hard for you to hide something from Prett.

>
 Now Prett leaned forward and took the picture from Cloud.

"Okay, now that I've got a visual, it won't take too long. But first, we need to bring a table or a bed in here." Prett told them.

>
 "I'll help," Cloud offered, spying a table in a room nearby. He wanted to bring Aeris back as soon as possible. They had a lot of catching up to do.

>
 "What are you talking about?" Prett asked with genuine confusion.

>
 It was now Cloud's turn to be confused. "Are you sure that you can move it by yourself? It looks kind of heavy." At Prett's vigorous nod, Cloud became even more confused. "But how?" he asked.

>
 Prett shrugged. "It's easy. I suppose that you would call it telekinesis or transportation." She didn't wait for a reply. Instead, she turned to the table, stood staring at it, and concentrated on lifting it.

>
 After a matter of seconds, the large redwood table floated and hovered in the air. Using her mind, Prett turned the table lengthwise and floated in through the narrow door in a move that was much easier than it looked. Once she had it in its desired position, she slowly lowered it to the floor.

>
 Why do I want to show off my powers? Prett wondered.

Normally, she would have asked for help, to make herself seem more normal. But there was something about these three that made her want to impress them-to be accepted by them. Prett knew that she didn't have time to waste on silly emotions that she would never be able to fulfill. What would it all come to in the end? No matter how much she proved herself, they would leave and she would be alone again. Well, the pain and suffering would stay with her, but that was beside the point. She knew that she couldn't go on this quest with them; she didn't have the time for that. Besides, she needed to protect herself. Mentally slapping herself, Prett pushed these emotions of hope and a wish of acceptance out of her mind. She tried to focus on the mission at hand. Once she completed it, she would never see them again. Then, perhaps, it would be easier to forget this.

>
 She shook her head once, trying to clear her mind of these thoughts once and for all. Now she looked towards Cloud. "Now to bring the one you call Aeris." Prett said.

>
 Cloud nodded solemnly. Truth be told, he didn't trust himself to speak. Now he sincerely and wholly believed that if anyone could bring Aeris back, it would have to be Prett. How many other people

did he know that could lift tables using only their minds?

>
 Prett was studying the picture of Aeris, absorbing every tiny detail and planting them piece by piece into her brain. When she felt that she had the correct mental image, she closed her eyes and drew in deep breath. She removed everything from her mind until all that remained was empty space. She then allowed Aeris's face to flood her mind completely and fully. She then visualized the table so that Aeris now occupied one half of her mind. The table filled the other half. Now Prett knew that she must concentrate on bringing Aeris here and onto the table.

>
 Beads of perspiration formed on Prett's forehead. Her muscles were tense under her skin. Cloud began to wonder if he should stop her. Did she actually know what she was doing? He glanced at the dusty table. It seemed that there was a figure on it, at first very faint, but filling out gradually. It was Aeris—he knew in his heart that it was her. Now he could see her more clearly. Her arms were clasped serenely over her chest and, even in death, a light smile played over her lips. Her sodden pink dress clung lovingly to her body and her formerly neat hair hung in damp strings. Cloud was aware of a faint dripping noise as water from her hair and her dress dropped to the redwood table.

>
 Almost there, Prett thought. If only she could hold out for just a little longer. Now beads of perspiration clung to her arms under the black leather jacket. Prett could feel streams of sweat cascading down her face, but she ignored it. Her hair was wet and matted to her skull. Her muscled arms and legs were taut under her clothing, but she would only need to concentrate for just a little longer. She could sense that Aeris was almost here.

>
 Vincent looked from Prett to Aeris in mute awe and disbelief. It was hard to believe that Prett was actually teleporting Aeris here! He had to admit that he admired and respected the girl. He locked his eyes onto Aeris. She looked too real to be a holographic image, and Vincent knew that she was not, but it was still hard to believe that Prett had literally teleported her here from halfway across the world.

>
 When Prett was completely sure that Aeris was indeed where she needed to be (which was above the table), she lowered Aeris onto it and opened her eyes, surveying her job. To her, it seemed a job well done.

>

> "See?" Prett panted, running her fingers through her sweat-drenched hair. That had been a lot harder than expected, but at least she had been able to do it!

> "So now you can bring her back to life?" Cloud asked, sounding both excited and nervous at the same time.

> Prett nodded resolutely as she took off her leather jacket. "What I have to do now should be simple enough. It doesn't require as much concentration on my part." She gave them a reassuring smile.

> "What *do* you have to do now?" Tifa asked Prett curiously.

>
 "Well, first we have to turn off the lights. Then you'll see," Prett replied as she walked over to the light switch and flicked off the lights, one by one.

>
 Prett now removed a tiny flask from a nearby cabinet. "Now everyone, remember to be especially still and quiet and everything should go according to plan." Prett took in a deep, shuddery breath. "Here goes nothing," she murmured.

>
 "Dark Father, I pray to you now to return this woman's soul to her body. I offer you sacrifice in return for this favor." Prett poured the liquid from the flask onto her fingers and sprinkled it

around Aeris's still form. When the liquid hit the table, it evaporated in thin wisps of blue smoke.

>
 Tifa smelled the light coppery scent and instantly recognized it. Blood! her mind shrieked, but Tifa remained perfectly still. She feared what would happen to her if she didn't.

>
 Prett was now chanting something in a different language-presumably Latin, by the sound of it. Abruptly Prett stopped talking. Her head was a bit tilted to her right, as if she were waiting for an answer.

>
 The answer came in a strong gust of wind. All the doors in the house blew open and a bright flash of light filled the room. Prett's hair billowed insanely behind her.

>
 Tifa resisted an urge to scream and run out of the house. Prett had said not to move and she had no intention of disobeying that command. The rubber band in her hair was long gone-a victim of the strong wind-and her hair now flew freely.

>
 At first Cloud had thought that the wind was just a cold, strong gust of wind, but now he realized that wasn't all there was to it. The wind was of a bluish color and in it he could see the white details of faces. Souls, his mind told him unquestioningly.

>
 Prett was scared out of her life. Though she had acted confident and experienced earlier, she had never done anything like this before. Nevertheless, she knew what this wind was doing-it was trying to match up Aeris's soul to her body.

>
 Tifa watched in silent wonder as the souls floated past Aeris's dead body. Men, women, children-all were faces carried in the wind.

>
 Eventually Aeris's face floated on the wind towards her body. The soul hovered above Aeris's body for a while, as if it were having second thoughts about returning, before it melted into her body.

>
 The other souls shrieked and flew through the open back door, to return to wherever they had come from. After the souls had left with the wind, all the doors slammed shut.

>
 Prett gasped at the doors shut, but at least she now knew exactly what she was doing. "Now for the finale," she whispered. Prett bent over and took her dagger from a sheath in her boot. With a quick slicing action, Prett made a slit in the palm of her hand. She let the blood drip in a circle around Aeris.

>
 Once the circle was complete, Prett murmured another phrase in Latin, and dropped to her knees. She indicated for the others to do the same, and, again, they obeyed.

>
 A force field of shining pink light was emitted from the circle of blood. Once the light barrier fell, Prett stood up and muttered another short phrase in Latin.

>
 "It is done," Prett said softly as she flipped the lights back on. "All we can do now is wait."

>
 Cloud swiftly got to his feet. "So she's alive now?" he asked.

>
 Prett gravely met his eyes. "I've done all I could do," she replied slowly as she bandaged the gash on her hand.

>
 "But she should be alive, right?" Cloud inquired impatiently.

>
 As if in answer to his question, Aeris sat up and yawned. "What time is it?" she asked as she stretched.

>
 "Aeris! You're-you're alive!" Cloud rushed to her side. "I can't believe it worked!" he exclaimed, all but jumping for joy.

>
 "Who are you?" Aeris questioned, regarding Cloud with suspicion. "And what are you doing in my room?" she demanded.

>
 "Excuse me?" Prett demanded haughtily. "Your room? I bring you back to life and everything, and this is the thanks I get? A girl

who doesn't even know that she's in my house?"

>
 Then Prett's face suddenly drained of color. "Oh, no," was all she could say.

>
 "Are you okay?" Tifa asked Prett hesitantly.

>
 "Something went wrong." Prett whispered.

>
 "What?" Vincent asked.

>
 "Aeris-she...she should be able to remember-she shouldn't be like this," Prett replied, still speaking in a whisper.

>
 Aeris cut in. "Who's Aeris?" she asked as she hopped off of the table.

>
 "You are," Cloud replied.

>
 "No, I'm not," Aeris told him, laughing. "I'm...ah, who am I again?" she asked, clearly puzzled.

>
 "You are Aeris Gainsborough," Cloud answered, also confused.

>
 "What went wrong?!" Prett demanded angrily, interrupting their wonderful little conversation. She began to pace around the room.

"How could this happen? I was so sure that I had it, so why?"

>
 "What could go wrong?" Tifa asked curiously.

>
 "I don't know! And that's the problem! It could be-it could be anything!" Prett threw her hands up in exasperation. "I don't know! Was she killed naturally? No! You already told me the answer to that one. Maybe she committed suicide before Sephiroth killed her."

>
 "Maybe it was because she was a Cetra?" Tifa suggested hopefully.

>
 "No, no, no!" Prett paced frantically in an effort to think. Suddenly she stopped pacing and snapped her fingers. "I've got it! Did you avenge her death?"

>
 "What?!" Tifa asked, not seeing the connection.

>
 "Did you avenge her death? You know, kill the guy that killed her?" Prett inquired quickly.

>
 "Well, yeah, but what's that-"

>
 "If you avenge the person's death, their soul must be guarded forever by the one who killed them. As a sort of punishment. So, in other words, Aeris's soul must be guarded by Sephiroth for all eternity," Prett replied seriously.

>
 "Well, that would explain it," Vincent murmured, looking over at Aeris.

>
 "How do we bring the real Aeris back?" Cloud asked.

>
 "We have to battle Sephiroth for her soul," Prett said calmly. "But...I don't know how to do that." For once, she did not look sure of herself.

>
 Cloud's jaw dropped. "You don't? So how-?"

>
 "However, I do know someone who does." Now Prett sighed. "But if I take you to her, you'll have to let me stay with you guys. You see, if you let her name slip, and if certain people find out where she lives, they'll kill her. And I can't allow that to happen. Now do we have a deal?" She held out her hand.

>
 "Yes," Cloud replied, shaking her hand after he thought it over for a while. "So who is this person that you are going to take us to?"

>
 Prett looked at him for a while then replied: "My mother, Sage Katrina."

>

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3. Default Chapter Title

Aeris's Resurrection Part 3

>

> "I thought you said she was dead!" Cloud exclaimed.

> "For her own protection!" Prett yelled back. "But now that I know why you want to see her, I can take you to her."

> "But it's the middle of the night!" Tifa protested. "Shouldn't we get some sleep first?"

> "Yeah, I'm tired." Aeris agreed, yawning.

> "No. We're going now. I really don't give a damn what time it is, okay? Now are we going or not?" Prett demanded angrily, her hands on her hips.

> Cloud shot an angry look in Tifa's direction before turning to Prett. "Let's get going," he said, offering her a tiny smile.

> "Good. Now follow me." Prett said. She led them to her garage to get her motorcycle, a shiny black Harley. "I'm not going to leave this behind." Prett explained as she led them back towards the cemetery, floating her motorcycle a few feet behind them using her mind.

> "Um...I'm kind of still soaked," Aeris said as they neared the graveyard. "Can't I change or anything?"

> "Too late," Prett replied coldly. They were already at the cemetery and Prett saw no need to turn around.

> She led them through the cemetery, to the town, and out of it, being sure to stay quiet so as not to wake anyone. "Now which one's yours?" Prett asked, motioning towards the cars in the parking lot.

> Vincent proudly led her to his Jaguar and unlocked it, but Prett seemed unimpressed. A little frustrated, Vincent instructed Cloud, Aeris, and Tifa to get in, and they willingly obeyed.

> After Prett saw that everyone had gotten into Vincent's car, Prett swung one leg over her motorcycle and started it up, motioning for the others to follow her. Then she drove off.

> "Where are we going?" Aeris asked Vincent sleepily.

> "I don't know," Vincent answered honestly. He was pretty sure that Prett would take them to Sage Katrina, but in the deepest corners of his mind, he was hoping that she wasn't leading them into some sort of a trap.

> To everyone's surprise, Prett stopped right in front of Cid's airship.

> "Well, we're here," Prett told them.

> "How'd you know where it was?" Vincent asked incredulously.

> "I have my ways." Prett smiled, amused.

> "What a nice...er...thing!" Aeris exclaimed, jumping out of the car.

> "Why did you bring us here?" Cloud demanded angrily. "I thought that you said that you were taking us to see Sage Katrina!"

> Prett looked at him with a look of absolute boredom on her face. "Calm down, Mr.Strife. My mother lives in Alamsy and that is too far to drive. Besides, your friends were beginning to get worried." She walked towards the airship, leaving Cloud to stare at her with his mouth hanging open. "Next time," Prett called out, "perhaps you

should think before you speak."

> Then a silver object came flying into Tifa's hands. "What the hell-"

> "Put my motorcycle away, please, Tifa?" Prett asked.

> "Oh, keys." Tifa got on the bike and followed Vincent into the built-in garage on the side of the airship. Good thing Cid had this thing renovated, she thought.

>
 When Tifa and Vincent got into the airship and went into the cockpit section, everyone was already sitting down, waiting for an explanation, apparently waiting for Tifa and Vincent, too.

>
 Once Cloud noticed that Vincent and Tifa had arrived, he told everyone about how Aeris had been brought back to life and what they needed to do to return her to normal.

>
 Yuffie regarded Prett skeptically at the mention of telekinesis, but silently agreed wholeheartedly that they should journey to Alamsy to see Sage Katrina. Who knew what kinds of materia they might have there! Then another thought struck her, one so appealing that she had to voice it aloud: "Holy shit! If Prett can do all those things that you guys mentioned, do you know how easy it would be to acquire new materia?" Yuffie's eyes glistened at the prospect.

>
 "Shu' up, foo'!" Barret yelled, and Yuffie meekly obeyed so Cloud could finish his retelling.

>
 Aeris had looked puzzled through entire relation of the tale, so she excused herself now to go to find the bathroom. She smelt like seawater and she wanted to go shower. (Yes, the new and improved Highwind did have a shower.)

>
 After Aeris left, Cloud finished the tale without anymore interruptions. Then he looked towards the other members of their small group for advice on what they should do.

>
 "Yeah, we should go to Alamsy. And let Prett stay with us. Let's not forget what I said earlier!" Yuffie said, her eyes beginning to sparkle again.

>
 "And she can move things with her mind. That would be helpful. Imagine how good she must be with materia!" Cait Sith exclaimed.

>
 "You don't need materia, do you?" Cloud asked.

>
 Prett shook her head. "I can summon up the effects in my mind. Mother taught me that type of sorcery too."

>
 "More materia for ME! Give her share of materia to me!" Yuffie exclaimed, delighted. Not only were they getting a new member who could help get materia, they were getting a new member who would not need materia! _Life is sweet_, Yuffie thought.

>
 Red XIII was a little concerned about allowing Pretticina into the group but didn't voice his opinion. He had some doubts about her. What if she was just playing them along, using her mind to control them like...like puppets, as Sephiroth had controlled Cloud? The idea made him uneasy and he dared not mention it to the others, who had accepted Prett wholeheartedly, if only a little hesitantly.

>
 As Red XIII was considering these thoughts, Aeris poked her head out of the bathroom door. "You know what? I have absolutely nothing to wear. Can I borrow something?" She gave them all a tiny smile.

>
 "Yeah, wear Vincent's ensemble!" Yuffie yelled, and started laughing hysterically, picturing Aeris in a black cape and Vincent's clothes. Vincent just shot her a dirty look, but Yuffie was too hysterical to notice.

>
 Tifa sighed. Though she too would love to see Aeris wearing Vincent's clothes, she supposed that she would have to come to the rescue again. "I suppose you can borrow one of my outfits." Tifa walked into a small room on the airship and emerged with a set of

clothing identical to what she was wearing. She handed this to Aeris, who thanked her sincerely and promised to return the favor someday. _By stealing Cloud from me?_ Tifa thought bitterly before walking back to join the others.

>
 "But now this leads us to another problem," Prett said in a matter-of-fact sort of tone. "Where are me and Aeris gonna sleep?"

>
 "Da livin' room?" Barret suggested.

>
 "Isn't it a good thing that I had this airship redesigned?" Cid asked the group, gazing fondly at his airship.

>
 "Oh my god! Did Cid just say a sentence without swearing?" Yuffie asked, laughing hysterically again.

>
 "He never does when he talks about his airship," Tifa muttered.

>
 "So we're going to Alamsy tomorrow?" Prett asked irritably. She was beginning to tire of this nonsense.

>
 "Yeah, we should rest before heading towards another town." Cloud nodded.

>
 "Well, see you all tomorrow!" Tifa yelled as she walked off into a room in the airship. The others began to follow suit, but Prett stopped Vincent before he could leave.

>
 "I want to talk to you," Prett told him, stopping him in his tracks. "Tell Aeris where your room is, you can sleep on the couch or the floor; I really don't give a damn, but you stay here, because I don't expect Aeris to stay up while we talk, and I don't expect our talk to be very short. Got all that?" Vincent nodded, and Prett nodded back curtly. "Good. Aeris, go to Vincent's room."

>
 "Where?" Aeris asked, and Vincent pointed. Aeris shot Prett and Vincent a strange look, wondering why they wanted her out of here, but she left without asking any questions, slamming the door as she entered the room.

>
 Vincent looked at Prett expectantly. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

>
 "Your life," Prett replied simply, as if the subject in question had no more meaning than asking him what he wanted for breakfast.

>
 Vincent looked at her, shocked. "My _life_?"

>
 "Yeah, you remind me of myself." Prett looked into his eyes, trying to get the information. "I want to know why."

>
 "It's a long story. I'll tell it to you some other day," Vincent said, not meaning to keep his promise, but not wanting to tell Prett about Lucrecia. How the hell would she know what it felt like, anyways? And why did she care?

>
 Prett seemed surprised. "Haven't you noticed some similarities between us?" Vincent deftly avoided her prying eyes. "Because I have, and I think that I know what you've been through. Don't get me wrong, it's not like I care about you or anything, but I was just wondering why." Vincent still made no reply.

>
 "Maybe I should start," Prett mused. "Maybe after you hear my story, you'll want to tell your own."

>
 "Maybe that's a good idea," Vincent agreed.

>
 "But I have one question: _will_ you tell me what happened to you if I talk first?" Prett asked him, raising one eyebrow.

>
 "I'm not making any promises," Vincent replied simply.

>
 Prett was silent for a while, contemplating whether or not she should tell him the fact behind the fiction. She wanted to know what had happened to him (she didn't really know why she wanted to know this; she just did), but she was afraid to tell him the truth. The truth might lead to her getting kicked out of their little group, and Prett didn't want that to happen. Her brows furrowed in frustration

and she ran a hand through her hair. "I've made up my mind. I'm going to tell you," Prett told Vincent. She irritably brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes before speaking. "Before I start, there are four things that you should know. 1) This takes place around the time that my mother was hanged. 2) My mother allowed herself to become a Shinra specimen in exchange for my safety and so that I would never have to comply and become part of Hojo's experimentations. 3) I had a pet dragon that my mother never knew about."

>
 While she had been speaking, Prett had been undoing the laces of the boot on her right foot. Now she pulled it off, and pointed to a dragon tattoo on her ankle. "I got this done because the dragon is my family's symbol, or guardian. That is the fourth thing that you need to know-that the dragon is supposed to be our guardian. With that said, I can start."

>
 "A day in March, I was out playing with my dragon-Bahamut, named after the GF-when I heard a scream. I told Bahamut to wait for me and scrambled down the little hill that we were on and over a log to investigate. When I was comfortably settled on the log, I looked down. I saw Steve (he was one of my friends and two years younger). Two other men were with him, both dressed in blue suits. They asked him something, and I heard my mother's name mentioned, but since I was so high up, I couldn't exactly hear right."

>
 "Luckily for me, they asked Steve again. The poor boy, meanwhile, was frozen with fear. They demanded that he tell them where Sage Katrina was. He tried to answer, but couldn't get his mouth to function correctly. I had a mind to go down there and kick the crap out of those two men (even at the age of 12, I was an excellent student), but something held me back. That something was what saved my life...and ended Steve's."

>
 "I would've jumped down and helped but intuition held me back. The split second after I decided to remain where I was, a man in a white lab coat stepped into my viewpoint. It was Hojo, the one man that I hated with all my heart, though in the course of my life, more would join him. Hojo was also the only man in that point of my life that I was entirely afraid of. I never trusted him, and I don't think that my mother did, either, though she did become his specimen for a couple of years."

>
 "But, anyways, back to the story. Hojo had stepped out, and he looked into Steve's eyes. I knew then that Steve wouldn't talk no matter what. If I was afraid of Hojo, Steve would be terrified. He was more easily scared than I was, and one look into those cold, mean eyes would settle it for him. I looked down at the three men and the one small boy, wondering what Hojo wanted with my mother. Her years with him were finished. She had allowed them to do research, so they should just leave her alone!"

>
 "Then Hojo said something, and everything grew suddenly quiet, so that I could hear his words clearly and perfectly. 'Give the boy 10 seconds,' he told the two men. 'If he doesn't start talking, shoot him.'"

>
 "Up on my log, I suddenly grew afraid for Steve. The seconds ticked by, and though Steve made many attempts to speak, he was unable to. Now I wanted desperately to help, but I knew that it would be too late. I couldn't get down to the clearing in less than ten seconds, and my magic attacks weren't strong enough to reach them. If I had wanted to help, I should've gone down earlier. Tears began to blur my vision as I realized that I would have to watch my best childhood friend be executed right in front of my eyes."

>
 "You don't have to, I told myself, and I listened. I turned and ran, not caring if they saw me, just knowing that I must escape this place as soon as possible. I didn't hear any gunshots, but I

heard Hojo's command. He told the men to use Fire or Ice materia to kill Steve. He said that he didn't want it to look as if the Turks or Shinra had anything to do with the boy's death. I heard what sounded to me like fire, and even from where I stood, I could feel the heat at my back.

>
 "That was when I lost my train of conscious thought. Now all that mattered was getting home safe, forgetting this day. I ran, crashing through bushes and running through puddles that lay in my path. My arms and legs were badly scraped up, but I didn't really care. I couldn't get the image of Steve-burnt to a crisp-out of my head. How could Hojo be so heartless, I asked myself as new tears formed in my eyes. He just executed Steve right on the spot, not caring about Steve's friends...or family, without even knowing who Steve was! Then he actually decided that he wanted to cover it up!

>
 "Now, you have to remember that I was sobbing and crying my eyes out, so I had no idea where I was headed. I was lucky all of this time, but what I did was unavoidable. I ended up tripping over a rock, falling and bashing my head on something or another, and I blacked out.

>
 "Bahamut was the one who woke me that night. In the pale moonlight, I could see blood all over my arms and legs from numerous little scratches. My shirt and shorts were torn. Basically, I was a mess. Then I brushed my hair out of my face and brought back my hand soaked with blood. I gingerly touched my forehead and felt a big gash there that still hadn't quite finished bleeding. All this time, Bahamut had been licking my cuts, trying to take the blood away. I was terrified, but somehow having Bahamut with me helped to calm my fears. He would make everything all right, I knew he would, because dragons were my family's guardians, so my dragon would have to protect me.

>
 "I threw my arms around his neck and just...wept for hours. I don't quite remember the line of events that night, but I must've healed myself sometime that night, because when I woke the next day, I was still bloody, but there were no more cuts on me. Even though I wasn't really thinking clearly that morning, I decided to wash myself off as best as I could. Nothing could really be done about my torn shirt and shorts, but that would be acceptable since I was playing in the woods all night. Of course, I had no idea what I would tell my mother, but I knew that I would have to head back soon, like about now.

>
 "So I patted Bahamut on the head and thanked him for staying with me, went to a stream, washed myself off as good as I could under the conditions, then headed back to town. Apparently someone (probably Hojo had informed had already found Steve's body, and a puppy had just been born with two heads, so they had decided to execute my mother while I lay sleeping in the woods.

>
 "No one saw me enter the village save my mother and Gerald, the guy that I was sort of dating at the time. My mother had a rope around her neck and a chair beneath her feet, and I guessed that they were about to pull the chair out from under her. When she saw me, she just smiled, regardless of her impending death. Gerald was the one who would have to kick the chair away, and he sent me a look of such sadness and pain that I pitied him and wondered what kind of a town I was living in that would make a thirteen year old boy commit murder.

>
 "Anyhow, my mother was killed right in front of my eyes. As she hung there, I began to cry, and people began to notice. I guess they felt bad or something, so they began to leave...guiltily. When everyone had left and I was alone with my mother, I decided that she

shouldn't just be left there to hang, even if she was dead. So I climbed up there, put the chair under her feet again, and cut the rope. She fell to the ground, regardless of the chair.

>
 "Then I thought to myself, What if she isn't really dead? I leaned over, summoning all of my powers, and just kneeled over her body, concentrating my energy into her still form. I could bring her back, I knew that I could, and I knew that I would. I don't know how I did it, but I somehow brought her back to life, if she had ever lost her life, and she just looked at me for a while.

>
 "'We should leave,' she told me, and I nodded.

>
 "'I would,' I replied, 'if I didn't have business here.'

>
 "She nodded, neither of us really knowing what we were talking about but both knowing that she would have to leave...and I would have to stay. She told me that she would have to leave now, and stroked my hair lovingly. She thanked me for bringing her back, and before she left, she said one last thing to me. It was that thing which made me sort of give up some of the guilt that I had harbored. She told me that I had learned all that I needed to know from her.

>
 "That may be very hard to understand for you, but it was a great achievement for me. After all of those years of studying, I had finally graduated. So when she went home to get my 2-year old sis, Stacie, I decided that I would take on Hojo. I would make him pay for what he did, and so I ran in the direction of where I thought that he would have headed.

>
 "As I suspected, he was looking for me, but it was me that found him outside of town. He looked happy to see me, but I wasn't happy to see him. We fought, and I won, but I didn't kill Hojo. I just succeeded in injuring him and he ran away, the two Turks following him. I won't tell you the specifics of our battle, because that's not really important. All I can say is that I scared him pretty badly, and he left me alone after that. But even through all of these years, I haven't really given up the guilt of watching my friend die before me...and not even doing anything about it." Prett was finished with her tale now and looked at Vincent to see his reaction.

>
 "The Turks...the ones that killed Steve...what were their names?" Vincent asked, recalling a similar chain of events from his past.

>
 "I don't think that I need to tell you that, do I?" Prett asked. "I can see it written all over your face." She laughed softly. "Funny, isn't it? That you were one of the Turks who helped to ruin my life. But don't worry, I don't hold it against you. It's the Shinra's fault, and..." She stopped, forgetting what she was about to say. "What's your story? I sense that you have one. I've gotten mines off my chest, what about you?"

>
 "You know that I was in the Turks, that's just one horror story out of many that I've been involved in. We just did that sort of thing...because it was our jobs. I was doing that all of my life, not wanting to get too close to anyone because you never know what job will come next." Vincent walked to the window in the Highwind and looked out of it into the still night. He, unlike Prett, had no desire to watch her reaction throughout his story. But he would make it as short as possible.

>
 "One day, all of my plans changed. I fell in love with a scientist-Lucrecia. I'm not sure if she loved me too, but she married Hojo. That was my sin, to not have been able to prevent that, knowing that there would be drastic consequences. I tried-did everything in my power, but it was impossible to stop them. Then they wanted to do an experiment, and I was against that, too, but they didn't listen to

me. They said that they were both scientists and that they were able to handle the consequences. I shouldn't have believed them." Vincent shook his head. "Well, because they refused to listen to me, Lucrecia and Hojo had a kid-Sephiroth. Hojo allowed Professor Gast to perform all kinds of experiments on Sephiroth, injecting him with Jenova cells, and Sephiroth grew up to be a psycho killer who ended up trying to destroy the world.

>
 "All these years, I've blamed myself for Sephiroth's existence. If only I had prevented Lucrecia from marrying Hojo, but she told me that it was for the sake of science. Life just went by as a sort of non-existent blur since then, and somewhere along the line, Hojo gave me this. I think that it was after he shot me and performed a strange experiment on me that allows me to transform into different beasts. That is the punishment for my sin." He held up his clawed hand. "Then later, I met up with Lucrecia. She wanted so much just to live a normal life. She never even held Sephiroth after his birth. The poor lady was so attached to Sephiroth, and there was no way that we could save him. That's when the guilt came back. It's been with me ever since. Why wasn't I able to prevent Sephiroth's birth? If only I had, Lucrecia... But anyways, there you have it, the shortened version of my story."

>
 "Wow," Prett said. "So Hojo ruined your life, too? God, I hate that jackass. The only regrets I have are of not being able to kill him myself. Of course, I have no desire to relive the entire thing, but...you know what I mean, don't you? I wish that I could just go back, and kill him...before my mother...before you and Lucrecia...well, before all of this happened. But...I can't. There's no spell in the world that can allow me to do that. So I just have to do the second best thing. Just live my life, and...and don't let him ruin what's left of it. You need to do that, too, Vincent. Just forget him. Just forget Lucrecia. Just forget the Turks. But I know that's impossible. Hell, I've had seven years to do it, and I haven't been able to."

>
 She shook her head. "I don't know what to do, but, just try. It's the best way, instead of trying to deal with the guilt. You helped to kill him, didn't you? But that won't take it away, I know that it won't." She laughed again. "It's strange how both of our lives are intertwined in this way. Hojo causes my mother's death, you were there, and Hojo ruined your...girlfriend(?)'s life."

>
 Wanting to change the subject, Vincent checked his watch. He was surprised to see that over an hour had passed. "We...I think that we need to get to sleep."

>
 Prett nodded in agreement. "I won't sleep easy tonight, though. Calling up old memories will bring them up in more detail in my dreams." Prett took off her left boot and put it with the other side. "You can have the couch." She walked over to the chocobo room (which now doubled as a closet, also) and grabbed a sleeping bag. "I'll take the floor."

>
 Vincent was more than happy to comply. He supposed that Prett was right. Was right about everything. But he knew that he too, would be troubled by memories tonight. He pulled the blanket over him. He'd be happy as soon as this day was gotten over with.

>

>

4. Default Chapter Title

Aeris's Resurrection Part 4

>

> * * * * *
>

Tifa woke the next morning, stretching. She looked over at the clock on the stand near her bed and groaned when she saw the time. 9:15? Why hadn't anyone woken her? She yawned as she walked into the living room.

>
 She first saw Prett sleeping peacefully on the floor, the blankets kicked down to her feet. The sight that surprised her was Vincent sleeping on the couch. Aeris was nowhere in sight. "Mostly everyone's probably asleep," Tifa said softly, her eyes flickering from Prett to Vincent. If Vincent was in here, where was Aeris?

Wait, let's back up a little. Why is Vincent in here?

>
 Pondering these thoughts, Tifa walked back into her room to brush her hair. Fifteen minutes later, Tifa's hair was perfect and she was ready to go. When she walked back into the room that Prett and Vincent were in, she saw Prett awake, sitting on the floor.

>
 "Is everyone still sleeping?" Prett asked Tifa incredulously. "I don't usually wake this late."

>
 "I guess so," Tifa replied, and her eyes flicked back to Vincent.

>
 Prett followed her line of vision and blushed when she realized that Vincent was still in the room. She tried to imagine what Tifa was thinking and found that she couldn't bring herself to. "It's a long story," Prett told Tifa, but offered no explanation. "And it's not what you think."

>
 "O...kay." Tifa looked around the room and wondered how close they were to Alamsy. "Want to go to the control room? I wonder if Cid's up yet." Tifa just decided to let the subject of Vincent drop.

>
 "I guess," Prett replied, glad that Tifa didn't ask her any follow-up questions about what Vincent was doing in the room that she and Aeris should have been sleeping in. She didn't feel like making up any lies today, and she knew that it would embarrass Vincent if she told the truth.

>
 Tifa led Prett into the control room. Cid was already up and steering the plane towards Alamsy.

>
 "Hi, Cid," Tifa said. "How long have you been up?"

>
 "Around 7:00," Cid replied, never turning to face Tifa while speaking to her. He was too busy concentrating on flying the airship.

>
 "Oh good!" Prett said enthusiastically. "We should almost be there!" She ran up to the huge (semi-) wrap-around window and looked down. The view that faced her was beautiful-grassy green valleys shadowed by towering majestic mountains. "It's just over this mountain," Prett informed Cid.

>
 Now Cid expertly maneuvered the plane past the mountain. He landed it with practiced perfection next to the large town.

>
 "Well, here we are," Cid told Tifa and Prett.

>
 "Wow, it took all night to get here," Prett said to herself. "I never realized that it would take so long." Louder, she told Cid and Tifa: "Maybe we should wake up the others!"

>
 "Yeah, let's get this show on the road!" Tifa agreed.

>
 "Damn straight," Cid also agreed.

>
 The three of them left the control room to wake the others who hadn't already woken up on their own.

>
 After everyone was awake and ready, which was about half an hour later, they all went to the deck to exit by the ladder.

>
 "Who's coming?" Yuffie asked nonchalantly, inwardly wondering what types of materia were in this town.

>
 "How about everyone comes as long as we all travel in different groups?" Cloud questioned, searching for approval. After he found it, he assigned groups: "Aeris and Prett will come with me; Tifa, Cid, and Barret will all go together; Yuffie, Vincent, and Red XIII; and Cait Sith can go with...Tifa's group." Once Cloud was done speaking, he turned and began to climb down the ladder.

>
 After everyone had exited the airship, Tifa led her group after Cloud's into the town of Alamsy. This town wasn't as beautiful as Svenson Hills; it looked more like a tourist trap or a resort town. Carts and stores selling souvenirs were everywhere. People cluttered the streets. Many skyscraper hotels were located on the eastern border of the town. _This is where her mother lives? _Tifa wondered in disbelief. Sure, there were a few houses here, but still...this wasn't exactly the perfect place to go unnoticed.

>
 Prett's voice interrupted Tifa's thoughts. "Follow me," Prett said as she carefully weaved her way through the crowds.

>
 After a while, they were in a back alley. "I forgot to tell you how crowded it is this time of year." Prett smiled apologetically.

>
 "You're telling me!" Cait Sith replied. He had been knocked off of his stuffed Moogle more than once. People apparently didn't watch where they were going, and almost certainly did not look down!

>
 "Thank God Mother's house is through the alleys. No one ever bothers to come back here." Prett motioned for them to follow as she continued through the alley.

>
 Prett made a sudden stop in front of a stack of crates. She hoisted herself up, then climbed onto the roof of a building.

>
 The building she was standing on finished about a foot before a large mountain. Prett watched to make sure that everyone had climbed onto the building, then motioned for them to remain low so as not to be seen. Once this task was completed, Prett positioned herself in the center of the roof, took a running leap, and grabbed a nearly hidden ledge in the mountain. She pulled herself up, barely visible in the shadows.

>
 "Hurry!" Prett yelled as quietly as possible. "Before someone sees you!"

>
 Tifa looked fearfully over the edge of the building. She groaned as she backed up, then ran and jumped. For a second, she thought that she wouldn't catch the ledge and it slipped under her fingers, but Prett helped her up. When Tifa was standing again, her legs would barely support her.

>
 After seeing Tifa make the jump, most everyone was reassured and also leapt to the ledge.

>
 Aeris, Cait Sith, and Red XIII all doubted if they could make it, so Prett "lifted" them and hurriedly brought them to the ledge.

>
 "Okay, it shouldn't be much farther now." Prett spun on her heel, then led them through a twisting rock corridor.

>
 She veered left into an almost invisible tunnel, then got to her hands and knees, searching for something. It took a while, but Prett finally found the small rock and pushed it. The wall in front of them opened like a huge door, and the path it revealed led into a wide corridor.

>
 In this clearing was a small house. The cottage looked as if it were made of the same type of rock as the clearing, and blended in perfectly.

>
 Prett walked over to the cottage door and knocked on it. The door was opened by a young girl in a long white robe.

>
 "Prett!" the girl shrieked. "Mommy, mommy, Prett's here!"

>
 "My little sister, Stacie," Prett explained after Stacie had run off to get Sage Katrina.

>
 A woman with graying hair came running at Stacie's shouts. She, also, was dressed in a flowing white robe. She had high, aristocratic cheekbones and warm, blue eyes.

>
 "Meet my mother, Sage Katrina," Prett told Cloud proudly. "If anyone can help you, it would be her."

>
 Sage Katrina smiled at Cloud, a little surprised to see other visitors in this remote area. "How can I help you?"

>
 "Are you going to invite them in?" Prett asked impatiently.

>
 "Oh, how silly of me! Won't you all come in? Stacie, go get more chairs for me, will you?" Sage Katrina said.

>
 "Yes, Mommy," the little girl replied and rushed off to complete the task at hand, bringing ten chairs into the room, and plopping down into one.

>
 Cloud and the rest of the group also sat down. Cloud was beginning to wonder what would happen next when Sage Katrina asked him a question:

>
 "So, tell me, how is it that I can help?"

>
 Cloud again retold the tale of Aeris's death, how they had avenged her death, and how Prett had tried to raise her from the dead, and how Aeris couldn't remember anything.

>
 Sage Katrina nodded solemnly. "You did well to bring them to me," she told Prett. "Alas, Prett was right. You must battle the one you call Sephiroth to save this girl's soul. Two battles must be fought. One of the mind, and one physically. One person may only fight one battle. I will fight the first one for you." She looked at them sharply. "And do not interfere."

>
 "No!" Prett practically yelled. "I will not have you fighting, Mother! Now if you'll just listen--"

>
 "Pretticina, it must be done." With that, Sage Katrina removed a bottle from a nearby cabinet. She threw it onto the floor and yelled a few words in Latin, raising her arms to the sky. A few seconds later, Sage Katrina's body convulsed, as if she was having a seizure. Her eyes rolled back, showing only the whites. Her head lolled backwards, then snapped forward in a sudden jerking movement. Sage Katrina let out a choked gasp.

>
 "MOMMY!" Stacie shrieked, on the verge of tears.

>
 "He's killing her!" Prett yelled frantically, lunging towards her mother. She caught Sage Katrina's arm. The air between them rippled, then a shudder ran through Prett's body. Unlike Sage Katrina, Prett held firm, not swaying or giving in.

>
 Sage Katrina fell to the ground, moaning, and Stacie ran to her, now weeping for Prett's safety.

>
 "What happened?" Vincent demanded, fearful for Prett's safety. _Why had we gotten innocent people involved in this anyways?_ He wondered.

>
 "That man," Prett's mother gasped. "He's in her mind now."

>
 * * * * *

>
 Prett found herself facing a man with long silver hair. She was in a void, surrounded by black empty space. Standing at 5'10", she was taller than most women, and was not intimidated by Sephiroth's height.

>
 Sephiroth laughed at her. "A little girl like you expects to beat me, the powerful Sephiroth?!" he asked incredulously. "Don't make me laugh."

>
 Prett angrily glared at him with her hands on her hips. "You tried to kill my mother, you bastard," she spat at him. "And for that, you must die."

>
 Sephiroth just glanced at her calmly. "I may not have succeeded with your mother, but I will kill you." He launched into his attack.

>
 * * * * *

>
 "Can't we do anything to help her?" Tifa asked as Prett winced.

>
 "We can only pray she'll be all right," Sage Katrina answered solemnly, trying to comfort her younger daughter.

>
 "What happens if sheâ€|if she dies in her mind?" Vincent asked, not wanting to think about things like that but unable to help himself.

>
 "Then her body will die also and her soul will belong to Sephiroth for all eternity," Sage Katrina replied sadly.

>
 "But that won't happen!" Stacie yelled confidently. "I know that Prett can beat him! I just _know _she can!"

>
 * * * * *

>
 Prett rolled to avoid Sephiroth's attack with his powerful masamune blade. As she did, she grabbed her small dagger out of her boot. She aimed for Sephiroth's heart and threw it with all her force. Prett expected it to kill him as it traveled in a straight course towards Sephiroth's chest. One hand fluttered to her mouth as she realized that she had just missed him. But not just _missed_. The weapon had traveled _right through him_, and Prett could not see even a single drop of blood.

>
 * * * * *

>
 They all saw the look of terror pass over Prett's face.

>
 "What's going on?" Cloud asked nervously.

>
 "Sheâ€|she doesn't know what to do. She's attacking him physically," Sage Katrina said slowly. "But physical attacks won't work in this battle. She needs to use her mind to win, but she doesn't realize that."

>
 "I'll tell her," Stacie said calmly, almost serenely. Stacie closed her eyes, shutting off all sight and sounds of the outside world. Her brows furrowed in concentration. Stacie cleared her mind of everything and envisioned Prett. _Prett, Prett, can you hear me?_ She was directing her thoughts towards the image of Prett in her head.

>
 * * * * *

>
 "Yeah, Stacie, loud and clear," Prett replied as Stacie's voice reverberated through the black nothingness. Prett ducked, then kicked at Sephiroth. Her foot, like the dagger, went right through him.

>
 "Prett, physical attacks won't work on him." Stacie sounded as if she were standing right next to Prett in the void. "You have to use mental attacks, Prett."

>
 "Mental, eh?" Prett mused out loud before Sephiroth's fist came flying into her face. She was thrown backwards and she could feel that her nose had begun to bleed. "Goddamn!"

>
 Prett quickly got to her feet. She would pay him back for this. She planted her feet firmly in the ground and closed her eyes. Prett envisioned fire. She imagined forest fires to get the mental image that she needed, then imaged Sephiroth. Sephiroth with his high and mighty attitude. She would burn that attitude away. Prett grinned and thought of how good it would be to watch him burn. She opened her eyes.

>
 Prett's eyes seemed to be on fire. Sparks flew from her lashes and disappeared into the void. Suddenly the air around her rippled as she directed this flamethrowing attack towards Sephiroth. Twin lines of flames flew from her eyes and made their own separate beelines towards Sephiroth.

>
 Prett heard him scream as his clothes caught on fire. He frantically beat at his hair, which had also been ignited. The bitch had actually hit him! This, Sephiroth found hard to believe. And for this, she would pay with her life.

>
 An ominous smile passed over her lips as she once more closed her eyes. This time she imagined icicles. Freezing icicles were formed in her mind. Sephiroth also occupied a half of her mind.

>
 Now when Prett opened her eyes, they were colder than ice. Five icicles formed in front of one outstretched hand. She looked at Sephiroth screaming in agony. "Poor baby," Prett said mockingly. "Don't worry, soon it'll all be over." She launched the icicles. They flew into Sephiroth's cape and pulled him backwards. When Prett brought up a wall using her mind, the icicles pinned Sephiroth to the wall and held him there.

>
 Prett looked towards Sephiroth before closing her eyes for what she hoped would be the final time in this battle. All of this was beginning to tire her out. Prett quickly summoned images of lightning in her mind. She directed this towards Sephiroth. His body convulsed and his head lolled forward. Prett knew that he was dead, and, surprising herself, smiled. Then, with no one to hear her, Prett started laughing hysterically into the black void.

>
 By the time that she returned to the real world, Prett had managed to stop herself. She hadn't wanted everyone to think that she was psycho like Sephiroth was. She shuddered, but smiled when she saw the others watching her.

>
 "You beat him?" Stacie asked her sister.

>
 "Of course I did." Prett smiled radiantly, then gave her younger sister a hug.

>
 Sephiroth now appeared in front of them all. He glared at Prett angrily. "You may have won the battle, bitch," and now he directed his gaze upon them all, "but don't expect to win the war."

>
 Sephiroth pulled out his masamune. "And you will be the first to die!" Sephiroth charged Prett, masamune raised.

>
 "NO!" Stacie shrieked as she saw what would inevitably happen if someone did not intervene. Stacie telekinetically "lifted" a chair and threw it at Sephiroth. It hit him in the back and he uttered a groan of pain before falling to the floor.

>
 Cloud drew his sword and ran towards Sephiroth. He brought his sword down, but Sephiroth rolled over and deflected the blow with his masamune before Cloud could do any damage. Then Sephiroth was able to catch hold of Cloud's sword and spun his masamune, wrenching Cloud's sword from his grip.

>
 Sephiroth raised the masamune high above his head, ready to bring it down upon Cloud, wanting to end that miserable little freak's life right on the spot.

>
 As Tifa saw all of this happen, Tifa knew that she needed to help Cloud. He needed her again. Tifa laced her hands together and brought them down on one of Sephiroth's arms, causing his aim to veer drastically. He missed Cloud by more than five inches.

>
 Seeing his beautiful plan ruined, Sephiroth lashed out at Tifa with his masamune, slicing her arm.

>
 Aeris shrieked as she saw the blood flowing from Tifa's wounded arm. Not thinking clearly, she grabbed a vase and threw it towards Sephiroth. Luckily for her, Aeris's aim proved true, however, and the vase shattered on the right side of Sephiroth's face, lodging some sharp clay fragments into his skin.

>
 Around this time, Barret and Vincent opened fire on Sephiroth, but they only managed to injure him.

>
 Now Yuffie decided that it was her time to help. She jumped

forward, holding her shuriken confidently in one hand. She swung it towards Sephiroth's neck, but he turned unexpectedly at the last second. Instead of his head, only part of his hair was chopped off.

>
 Sephiroth roughly threw Yuffie out of the way and turned towards Prett, raising his sword high above her head. It was all her fault that he was in so much pain, and he would make her suffer.

>
 Vincent watched as Sephiroth brought the masamune down. At the last second, he leaped in front of Prett to protect her. He couldn't let her die. She was the only person who he felt could really understand him, and he knew that he needed to talk to her more. Maybe even needed her to help him recover from the guilt.

>
 Sephiroth drove the masamune through Vincent's side, but Vincent was able to fire the fatal shot that passed through the center of Sephiroth's forehead.

>
 Prett screamed and reached for Vincent as he and Sephiroth fell to the floor. Sephiroth would most certainly die-was probably already dead-but what use would that be if Vincent died also? He would never have a chance to redeem himself from the guilt and start a new life, and the one person who could relate to at least part of her pain would be gone forever. But Vincent couldn't die, could he? Prett couldn't think straight and slapped herself, surprising the others. She would be no help to any of them if she went on being hysterical like this.

>
 From the ground, Sephiroth let out a last choking gasp, making a final lunge for his masamune, but he was unable to reach it before he died.

>
 Prett knew that Sephiroth was dead. Yes, she could feel it. You bitch, she thought miserably. I hope you die a thousand deaths, and suffer an eternity of horrors.

>
 "Quickly, Stacie, fetch the herbs!" Prett heard her mother's voice. It seemed distant. It didn't matter anymore. Nothing did. Vincent was dead. She sighed sadly. What had she done to be forced to watch all of her friends die right in front of her eyes?

>
 Cloud saw Stacie run from the pantry, pale as a ghost. Cloud recognized the herbs that Stacie silently passed to Sage Katrina. Those were the same herbs that his nurse had used on him back at Nicholstown. Maybe Vincent did have a chance, after all. Cloud didn't want to have to watch another ally die, too.

>
 Stacie watched as Sage Katrina yanked up Vincent's shirt, revealing the wound beneath. That made Stacie sick. Will the herbs actually heal him? But Mommy said they would, so they probably will. Mommy's never wrong, Stacie convinced herself.

>
 Sage Katrina rubbed the herbs over the gash in Vincent's side. His body began regenerating at once. The broken blood vessels began to knit themselves together. The muscles reconnected. Vincent's skin formed a mesh over the wound, then filled up.

>
 Tifa heard Vincent let out a little groan. She could see that he was in a lot of pain, but Tifa knew that he would survive. That was good. Tifa didn't want to lose another of her friends. Tifa saw Vincent begin to sit, but he fell back to the floor, unconscious.

>
 "Is he going to be okay?" Aeris asked, concerned. Once Sephiroth had been defeated for the second time, her memory had returned. She now had a throbbing headache, but she was more worried about Vincent than about her headache.

>
 "He should be," Sage Katrina replied confidently.

>
 "He better be," Prett replied coldly. "Or I'll have to bring Sephiroth up here and kick his ass again to bring Vincent back." Her eyes narrowed. "And I would."

>
 "What about you, Tifa?" Stacie asked, ignoring Prett. She held

up the herbs.

>
 Tifa started at the mention of her name. Tifa offered her injured arm to Stacie, and Stacie spread the herbs over Tifa's cut. Tifa watched in rapt fascination as she watched her arm regenerate itself. That was so weird, yet cool.

>
 "I'm going to head back to my airship," Cid announced. "It's already late. Seems like defeated that bastard took longer than we thought. And I don't know what the goddamned tourists might have done to her." With 'her', Cid was referring to his airship.

>
 "Are you sure you can find your way out?" Prett asked Cid.

>
 "Of course," Cid replied. "Now is anyone else coming with me?" Cid wanted to return to his precious airship as soon as possible.

>
 "Cid, I is comin' witcha," Barret told him.

>
 Red XIII and Cait Sith also wanted to leave, and the four started walking off.

>
 "H-hey, wait up!" Yuffie called, running after them.

>
 Aeris, Cloud, Tifa, Prett, and Vincent had all elected to stay behind. Well, for Vincent, it wasn't really a conscious decision; Sage Katrina just thought that it would not be wise to move him in case anything else happened.

>
 Sage Katrina looked worried. "I'm not sure if I have enough rooms for all of you. I suppose Stacie could come sleep in my room with me, but there would still be only three rooms."

>
 "That's okay; I probably won't be able to sleep anyways. I'll clean this room." Prett looked at the blood splattered on the floor and walls and the broken vase pieces on the floor. Yes, she didn't think that she'd be able to sleep tonight. "Put Vincent by himself. I may check up on him, but if I do get to sleep, maybe I can stay with Tifa."

>
 "Yes, and I'll stay with Aeris," Cloud said.

>
 Aeris giggled. "Yeah, we have a lot of catching up to do. You can tell me what you all have been doing since I died."

>
 Cloud agreed, and they all went off to their rooms.

>
 Tifa shut the door behind her. She held one of Stacie's teddy bears to her chest and cried silently. She knew now that there was no chance that Cloud would ever fall in love with her. Why would he when he had a girl like Aeris?

>
 To hell with him, Tifa thought viciously, unconsciously squeezing the bear tighter. She sighed softly, now able to stop the tears flowing from her eyes. She decided that she would just have to let him go.

>
 Tifa released her death-grip on the teddy and let it slip out of her hands to the floor. She would always have his friendship, and trying to take his love might ruin that for them. She would just let him go. Flush all of her love for him down the drain.

>
 She sobbed. But that was easier said than done, wasn't it? It would take time, she knew that much. But then again, she had all the time in the world, didn't she? He would be spending all of his time with Aeris now; when would he ever have time for Tifa?

>
 Tifa buried her face in Stacie's pillow and wept. Each tear released a tiny bit of her love for him. How could she love a man who made her cry this much? Tifa knew that even with these thoughts, she'd never be rid of all her love for him, but she'd have to try.

>
 An hour later, Tifa had cried herself to sleep.

>
 * * * * *

>
 Tifa woke the next morning feeling considerably better. There was only a tiny reminder of the pain for which there was no known cure-the pain of a broken heart.

>
 She knew that she could live without Cloud as the main object

and idol of her life. Tifa was a survivor, and a strong one at that. She smiled to herself as she glanced into the mirror. It was a weak, feeble smile, but it was a smile nonetheless.

>
 The beginning of a smile, she thought. _For the beginning of a new life._

>
 Tifa walked into the living room of Sage Katrina's house. Prett was asleep on the couch, but the room was clean now. Tifa's stomach growled and she wondered what time it was. Tifa patted her stomach.

>
 When Tifa looked up, she saw that Prett had woken up by now. "Morning," Tifa greeted her.

>
 "Where is everyone?" Prett asked, yawning. "I need to go wake up Stacie or someone so they can make breakfast." Prett got off of the couch and walked to Sage Katrina's room.

>
 * * * * *

>
 Cloud woke up, yawning. He was surprised and horrified to see that Aeris was no longer next to him. He sat up quickly and his eyes frantically searched the room for her. He felt sorrow mixed with dread. Had everything been a dream? But it had all been so graphic and realistic. And why would he be in this strange place if it weren't real? It was probably still a dream, though. Cloud was sure of it. Then doubts came with that thought. How could this be a dream?

>
 Aeris walked into the room, assuring Cloud that this was indeed not a dream.

>
 "Aeris!" Cloud cried out in mixed relief and surprise.

>
 "Hmm? Oh, morning, Cloud." She smiled sweetly at him, then sat next to him on the bed.

>
 "Where were you?" Cloud asked.

>
 "Well, I had to freshen up!" Aeris retorted. "Why?"

>
 "I thought I'd lost you again," Cloud replied softly. "When I woke up alone, I thought that you were gone forever. With how close I came to losing you the first time, I don't know if I could hand that again."

>
 "Oh, Cloud!" Her eyes brimmed with tears for him. "You'll never lose me again," she said solemnly and hugged him tight.

>
 Cloud hugged her back when they heard a knock on the door. Stacie was calling them all to breakfast.

>
 Cloud grabbed Aeris's hand and they walked to the kitchen, where they were served toast, bacon, and eggs.

>
 "I made it," Stacie announced proudly.

>
 They all quickly finished their breakfasts (Vincent, by now was recovered, and was also at the table) and then Cloud announced that they must leave.

>
 "Why?" Stacie asked.

>
 "Others need our help," Cloud explained.

>
 "Fine, but you have to promise to visit," Stacie ran off to tell her mother.

>
 "We'd better get going," Cloud said. He stood up and prepared to leave. Aeris and Tifa followed him out. "If we wait to thank Sage Katrina or Stacie, they might want us to stay longer, and Cid'll kill us if we get back to the airship late."

>
 Vincent began to follow them out and was surprised when Prett only followed them all to the door. "Aren't you coming?"

>
 "I can't," Prett replied, glancing back towards the house. "You saw Mother; she's not doing so well right now, and and I don't think that she has very long to live. If If she dies out here in the middle of nowhere, who'll take care of Stacie? I I have to stay."

>
 "But I need you," Vincent told her. "You're the only one who

can understand me, the only one who can help me."

>
 "For now I have to stay here. I know that I can trust you to keep Sage Katrina's home a secret, can't I? You're my friend, the first one I've had in years. Maybe someday we'll meet again." Prett looked into his eyes and he saw that she was telling the truth.

>
 "Don't worry; I'll protect her secret," Vincent replied. "Goodbye for now, and|good luck."

>
 Prett smiled at him and Vincent began to walk away. Only when he arrived out of the city did Vincent look back. He remembered her words:_ 'Maybe someday we'll meet again.'_ "Maybe we will," Vincent told the town. "Hopefully under better circumstances. For now, thank you." Then Vincent turned and headed back towards the airship, preparing to tell the others that Prett would not, in fact, be joining them on their journey.

>
 The End

>
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End
file.